

# **Center Character Survey Analysis**

for the

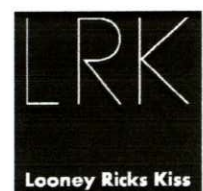
## **Storrs Center Municipal Development Plan**

Prepared for:

## **Mansfield Downtown Partnership**

by:

June 10, 2003



# Center Character Survey Analysis



## **Purpose of the Center - Character Survey**

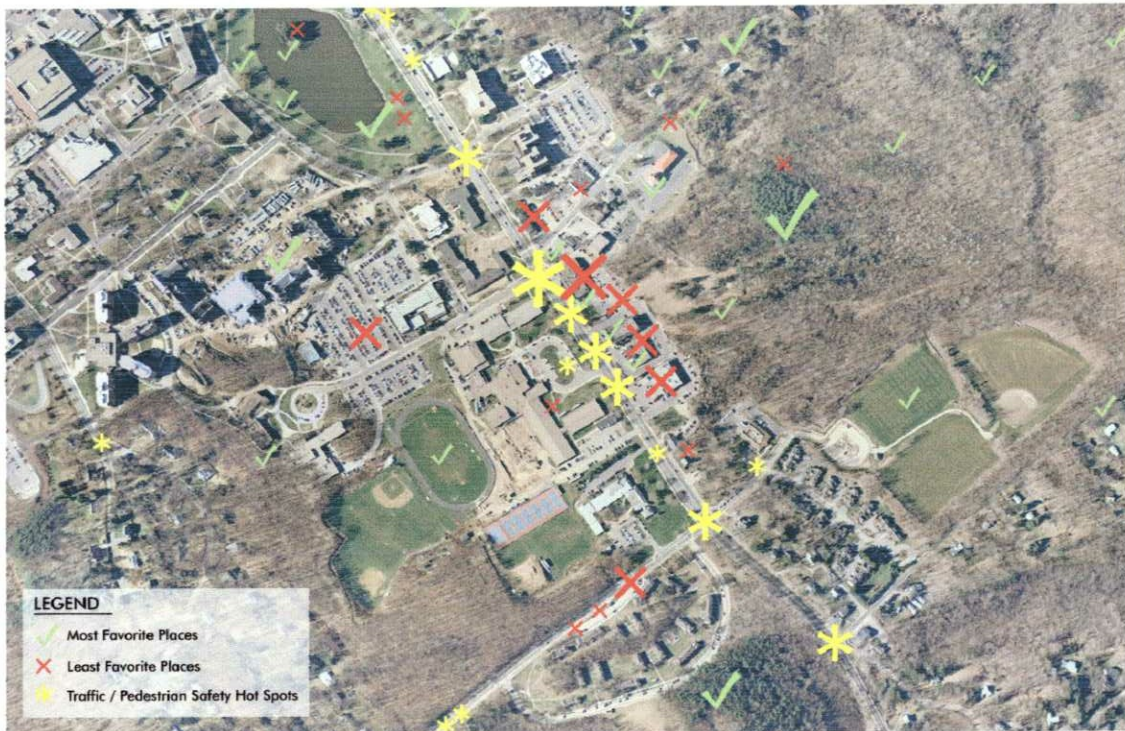
The Storrs Center design team conducted a center character survey May 1, 2003 to assess community preferences for the character of open space, streetscapes and architecture in Storrs Center. There were over 70 attendees representing a broad cross section of residents and property owners as well as students, faculty and staff from the University of Connecticut. The outcome of this survey will guide the Downtown Mansfield Partnership and its design team in the creation of a mixed-use commercial and residential center for Mansfield.

## **Survey Approach & Methodology**

The survey was designed by Looney Ricks Kiss and EDAW to identify community preferences for the architectural character, open space character and streetscape character appropriate for Storrs Center. Upon arriving at the event, survey respondents were invited to place colored dots on an aerial photo of Storrs Center locating their "most favorite places", "least favorite places" and "traffic/ pedestrian hot spots." This method identifies specific geographic areas of focus for consideration during the design of Storrs Center. The summary of these findings is presented on page 3 as the Site Preferences Map. Attendees were then asked to complete a brief written survey identifying their place of residence, affiliation with the University of Connecticut and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of Storrs Center. These results are summarized on page 4.

Following this written survey, a visually-based Center Character Survey was then presented as a series of four images on a large projection screen. This methodology presents a forced choice scenario where one of the four images or none must be selected. Sixty-eight images in sets of four were arranged in four topics: open space, streetscape, overall architectural character and residential architectural character. Each set of four images was carefully selected to present a full spectrum of choices including a variety of open space, architecture and building heights. Respondents were then asked to choose the most appropriate image or "none" for Storrs Center. Space was provided for written comments to further clarify their choices. The images were presented on a large screen without discussion during the first round; then the same images were presented for discussion. The facilitator sought comments from respondents while these comments were written on large sheets of newsprint. A summary of these findings follows on page 5 while the more detailed results appear on page 12 as the Detailed Survey Results.

### Site Preferences Map



The locations of the “most favorite places,” “least favorite places” and “pedestrian/ traffic hot spots” for the Storrs Center vicinity are identified on the aerial photograph above, based upon the colored dots placed by the survey attendees. This map of colored dots was translated into a map highlighting those trends. Some of these locations are within the Storrs Center project area, while others are beyond its boundaries. During subsequent stages of the planning and design process, the “favorite” places will receive considerable attention, to protect or enhance their character, while the “least favorite” and “traffic / pedestrian safety hot spots” should be addressed in a manner that will either eliminate or mitigate the negative impact of present conditions.





### Respondent Profiles

Storrs Center Character Survey respondents consisted mainly of people who live in the Town of Mansfield. More than half of the respondents are affiliated with the University of Connecticut. One in three respondents is an alumnae of the university, one in five respondents is a faculty/staff member and one in ten respondents is an undergraduate student. One in four of all respondents lives within ten minutes walking distance to the Storrs Center. Lastly, one in ten respondents owns either a business or commercial property in the area.

About half of the respondents completed portions of the Strengths/Opportunities and Weaknesses/Challenges section of the survey. The Strengths and Opportunities are characterized as follows:

- The potential development of Storrs Center was chosen by one in four respondents;
- The relationship between the University of Connecticut and Storrs Center was identified by one in five respondents;
- The semi-rural character and the amenities (e.g. restaurants, shops) were indicated by one in five respondents; and
- Storrs Center as a central gathering place and the surrounding open space were identified by one in nine respondents.

The weaknesses and challenges to Storrs Center are characterized as follows:

- Traffic was identified by one in three respondents;
- Architectural character was also identified by one in three respondents;
- Parking was identified by one in five respondents;
- The reduced summer population was identified by one in five respondents; and
- The lack of viable businesses was also indicated by one in five respondents.

These responses should be instructive to the Mansfield Downtown Partnership and its design team as planning for Storrs Center continues.

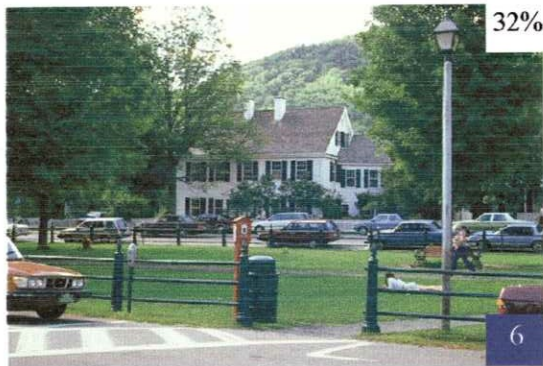


### Appropriate Open Spaces

#### Edges

Retaining a rural wooded ambience at the edge of Storrs Center is important to the character of the Mansfield vicinity. Image 1 establishes the preference for wooded landscapes defining the edges of Storrs Center. Based upon discussion and feedback from respondents, the rural edge for Storrs Center should be characterized by field stone walls, wooded forests, recreational trails and informal seating areas.

As indicated on Image 3, selected by over one-half the respondents, there is a strong preference for small park spaces defined by hedges, wide walkways, shade trees and seating. In addition, it was stressed in the survey that the scale of the buildings should be appropriate to the scale of the open spaces and be compatible with existing campus architecture.

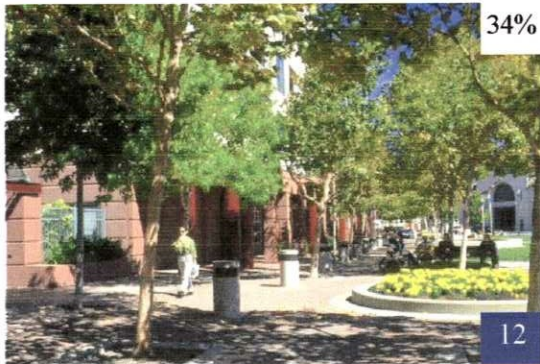


#### Town Greens

The Center Character Survey indicated that the character of the open space and town green should be reflective of a traditional New England town. As shown on Image 6, one in three respondents want a Town Green comprised primarily of lawn area with enough paving to allow the space to be versatile. The preferred town green would be surrounded by shopping and restaurants in mixed use buildings and would include a focal point such as a fountain. A significant feature with moving water is preferred to mitigate nearby traffic noise and to create a peaceful setting. Such a town green space could accommodate small concerts, art shows, a farmer's market, town fair and other informal activities such as walking, cycling, and relaxing. With its informal tree placement, mixed use buildings of varying scales, on-street parking, grass lawn and benches, Image 7 was selected by one in four respondents.



### Appropriate Open Spaces

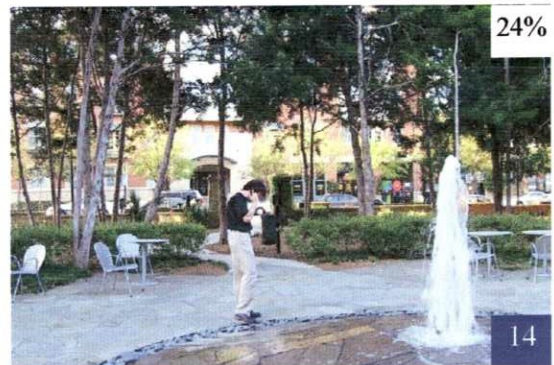


#### Small Parks

For smaller parks, a variety of paving materials was preferred with enough space for seating and tables. Shade and plant variety were preferred in these spaces, and it was stressed that hard materials such as paving should not dominate the space. The spaces need to be "people friendly" with appropriate scale and inviting for small gatherings or an outdoor lunch. Image 14 demonstrates the preference for active water features, informal seating and meandering paths under a protected tree canopy. With over 4 in 10 respondents choosing Image 16, this image demonstrates a preference for quality landscaping and flowering trees and seating amidst trees.

#### Plazas

Paved areas should be of brick or similar textured materials to reflect the New England vernacular and ample space should be provided for seating areas and shade trees. In addition to shade trees, plantings with seasonal color and variety are preferred. With one half of all respondents choosing Image 10 as their favorite, there is a strong consensus for plazas with textured paving, ornamental lighting, cafe seating, tree canopied spaces surrounded by diverse storefront architecture. Destinations need to be visible from the streets and two to three story buildings should surround the space, with varying roof heights preferable. The paved surfaces should offer seating and space suitable for accommodating a wide range of activities and events including outdoor dining. Respondents' suggestion that a clock tower, monument or other identifying element(s) be introduced in combination with typical outdoor furnishings is significant, and can help to encourage both active and passive use of the space in order to avoid having an "empty plaza."





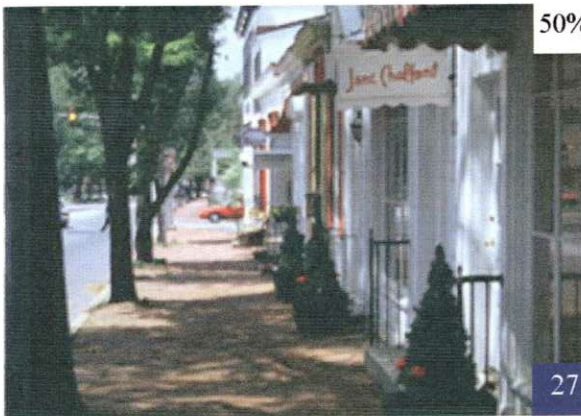
## Appropriate Streetscapes



Appropriate streetscape characteristics include human scale, shade, street trees, brick or stone paving, benches and tables with seating. Activity is an important element of the streetscape and the sidewalks need to be wide enough to accommodate pedestrians, transit riders, shoppers, and people sitting outside a café or restaurant. Awnings, overhangs and signage add to the streetscape scale, and placing utilities underground is essential. Streetscape icons such as a clock tower are appropriate if the sidewalk is wide enough. On-street parking is important for generating activity and for the success of the retail establishments. Parallel parking and occasionally angled parking is appropriate with this scale of streetscape development. Buildings with varying heights and sidewalk alignment (setbacks) are preferable.

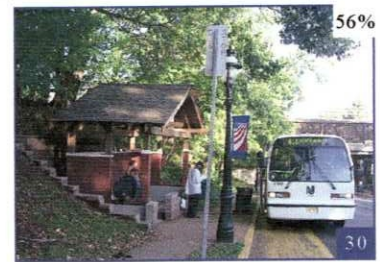


With nearly 6 in 10 respondents choosing images 20 and 21, there is a strong preference for wide sidewalks, diverse architectural storefronts, café seating, variety in building heights, street trees, parallel parking, and pedestrian oriented streets. These streets should feature street furnishings such as trash receptacles and light poles – with the potential to add banners – combined with street trees for shade are appropriate. The use of field stone is highly prevalent in the rural Connecticut landscape and many expressed a desire to use stone as a feature in Storrs Center.



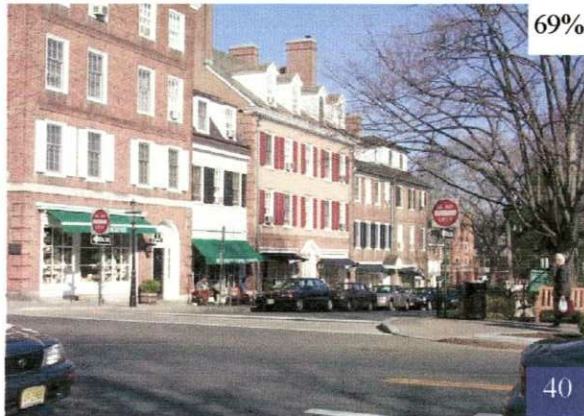
With 5 of 10 respondents choosing Image 27, it is an important indicator of the acceptance for smaller sidewalks, low landscaping at storefronts, small scale perpendicular signage, unique canopies and awnings and brick sidewalks. It should be noted that this image does not show on-street parking; however, the street trees are important to establishing the sense of safety from moving cars.

As shown in Image 30, bus stops should be designed to create a shelter that is appropriate architecturally and is located in the proper place, i.e., near a café and in a safe place within the vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns. Shelters are more appropriate than open-air structures in this climate, so the bench(es) can be sheltered from the elements. The streetscape as well as bus stops should be designed for pedestrians and cyclists.





### Appropriate Architectural Character



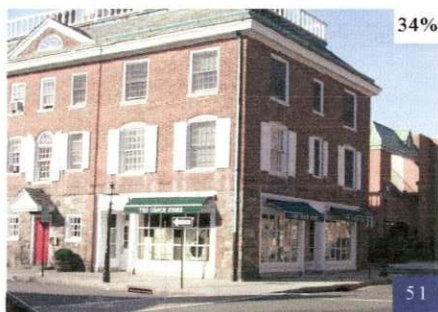
The survey indicated a general preference for two and three story buildings, with occasional use of single and four story buildings to offer a variety of heights. It is important that the edge appear as though it evolved over many years to create an organic pattern. Given the rural tradition of Mansfield, some participants preferred buildings that were separated rather than attached. In general, commercial storefront uses are preferred on the ground floor, with a mix of office and/or residential uses on the upper floors. Desirable architectural features include balconies, towers, bay windows, porches, gables, eaves, chimneys, storefront windows and coursing.



Image 40 with its attractive brick and clapboard architecture, varied rooves and dormers, street trees, shutters and New England character was the most highly preferred image in the entire survey. Given that 7 of 10 respondents chose this image, it should be a significant consideration in the design of Storrs Center. With nearly 5 of 10 respondents choosing image 36, there is a strong preference for brick architecture



No single architectural style was preferred, and in fact a variety of styles was considered desirable. In addition to the desire for diversity, many people preferred the colonial style commonly found in smaller and more rural New England towns. A few participants felt a more contemporary style would be appropriate. There was a general indication that contemporary interpretations of traditional New England architecture are preferable to historicism.



There was a preference for a variety of architectural materials including red brick, horizontal clapboard and, to a lesser degree, stucco. In particular there were positive responses to occasional use of cut stone on the ground floors as well as the use of white painted wood trim. There was a preference for windows of a commercial or residential scale, especially divided panes, and industrial scaled windows should be avoided. Some people particularly liked windows with flat arches and windows similar to those in the Mansfield Town Hall.





### Appropriate Residential Architecture

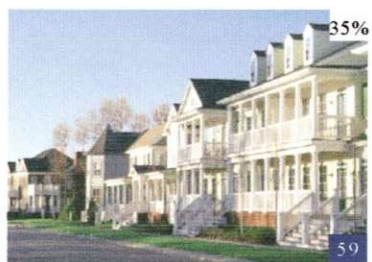


Community preferences for residential architecture at Storrs Center focused on New England building styles such as colonial, cottage and Victorian. Building material preferences include clapboard, red brick, and the occasional use of stucco. There was positive acceptance of mixed-use buildings where residences are located above commercial space. However, such buildings need to demonstrate sensitivity to height and to incorporate frequent use of shutters, porches, gables, balconies, stoops, horizontal coursing and varied setbacks. These elements were perceived as adding vitality to the architectural character. Many of the preferred buildings also provided landscaping within the front yard.



There was a general preference for buildings with a mix of materials on various floors rather than single material buildings. White and light colored clapboard appears to have broad acceptance. Many survey participants chose images with steeply pitched roofs and gables rather than buildings with flat parapets. A number of the preferred images showed arched windows and bay windows, especially on upper floors.

Given that one in four respondents chose None in their responses, it recognizes that there is a diverse range of opinions on appropriate architecture for Storrs Center.





### Inappropriate Open Space and Streetscapes



The buildings at image 5 are out of scale for a town center open space and are more appropriate in a larger town or a corporate setting. The open space in Image 4 appears too corporate and overscaled for Storrs Center. Also, images 4 and 9 do not express a sense of community and are not suitable for informal social gatherings or planned activities. Image 9 appears to be designed to accommodate automobiles and therefore does not depict a pedestrian friendly space. The architecture in this image is not appropriate – in either scale or design - for the Storrs environment. The landscape does not have enough variety in size, texture and color to be attractive year round.

The spaces shown in images 9 and 24 have too much paving and are not appropriately scaled. The buildings are not of New England vernacular and do not enhance the human scale of the spaces. The lack of buildings along the sidewalk make Image 24 undesirable.



The images above do not illustrate the opportunity for diverse activities and run the risk of producing "empty" public spaces.

In image 26 the narrow sidewalk and lack of street furnishings makes for an uninviting streetscape on which no browsing, seating or social interaction would likely occur. Also, the lack of architectural interest and scale contributes to the inappropriateness of this streetscape. Due to the frequent winter snows in the Mansfield area, hedges and overly narrow grass strips are inappropriate between sidewalks and streets.

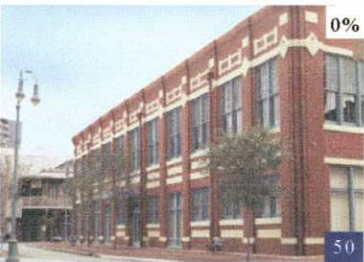
Image 25 demonstrates that street trees and streetlights are inadequate to create a complete streetscape experience. Storefronts are missing from this image. In general there is a need to create a holistic experience that brings together architecture and streetscape experience.



### Inappropriate Architecture



The scale of buildings was important to workshop attendees. Many noted that continuous walls of attached buildings without breaks were inappropriate for Storrs Center. Straight, flat planes of unbroken buildings should be avoided. The survey results suggested that groupings of buildings of four or more stories, such as image 57, were perceived to be inappropriate. In addition to concerns about buildings being too tall, attendees were also concerned that one-story buildings may not create the character of spaces for Storrs Center. Attendees were particularly adamant that brick mill building architecture was not desirable. There appears to be negative connotations, as shown in the responses to Image 44 and 50, to the idea of placing industrial buildings in a town that prides itself on being a village and a college town.



Survey participants expressed a strong desire to avoid buildings that appeared industrial or overtly urban in nature. Many of the images showing buildings with predominantly four or more stories were selected as inappropriate for Storrs Center. In addition to the concerns about building scale, a number of people felt that buildings with too many second story porches and too much outdoor space would be inappropriate for the long winters in New England. Buildings that are more common in southern climates or "suburban" settings were avoided in favor of buildings that reinforce a vibrant New England neighborhood. Many of the buildings with flat parapet roofs and industrial scaled walls and windows were also inappropriate.



Survey participants voiced a number of preferences regarding the elements and materials that define architectural character. Buildings with flat parapets lacking architectural detail were discouraged, such as Image 39. Windows that appear overly large in scale or lacking individual panes were perceived to be inappropriate.

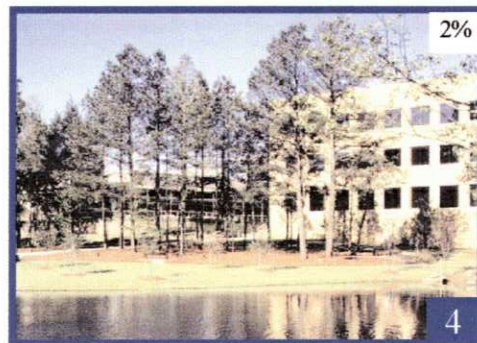
## **Detailed Survey Results**

Images preferred by character survey participants - expressed as percentages of preferred Storrs Center character - and representative survey comments are illustrated on the following pages.



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### OPEN SPACE AT EDGES



**None - 2%**

#### **Image 1**

- Prefer informality and unmanicured appearance
- Want more emphasis on our rural natural beauty
- Plaza good with benches and paths
- Like combo of trees and pavement

#### **Image 2**

- More trees are needed
- Like brick facade backdrop
- Prefer smaller open spaces

#### **Image 3**

- Need trees and unmanicured look with seating

#### **Image 4**

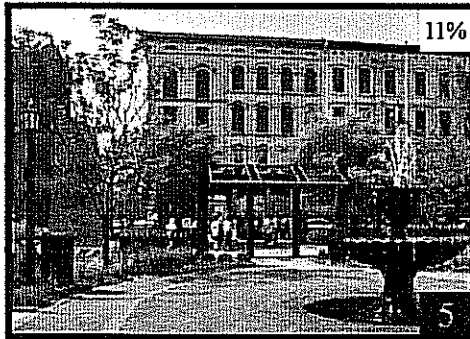
- Well-defined edge is nice

#### **None**

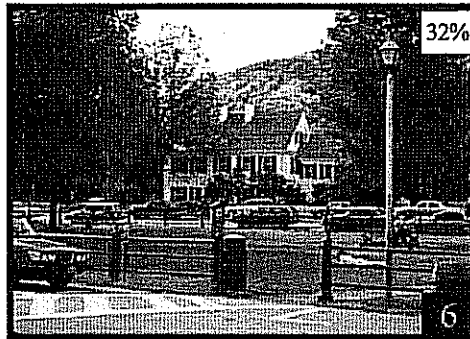
- There should be New England green, more houses, white churches and home offices.



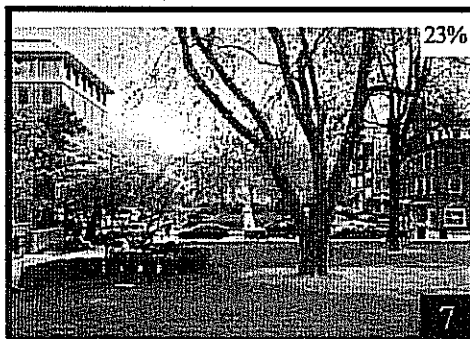
# Center Character Survey Analysis



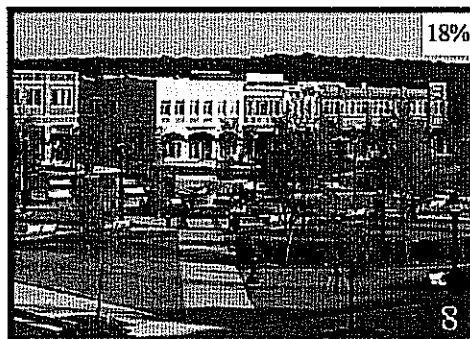
11%



32%



23%



18%

## Image 5

- Like the fountain, brick walkway, grass, arbor
- Large building out of scale

## Image 6

- Like idea of greenway from one area to another
- Hints of Colonial Williamsburg
- Looks New England-ish
- Real town-green look
- Nice place to sit

## Image 7

- Like mix of elements – open space needs to be defined by building edges
- Homey, downtown feel, but not smalltown
- Nice to have central focus (like fountain) for sitting and businesses near

## Image 8

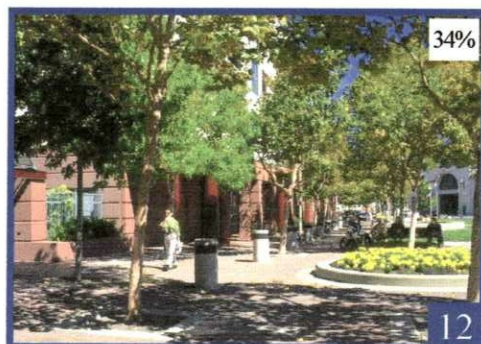
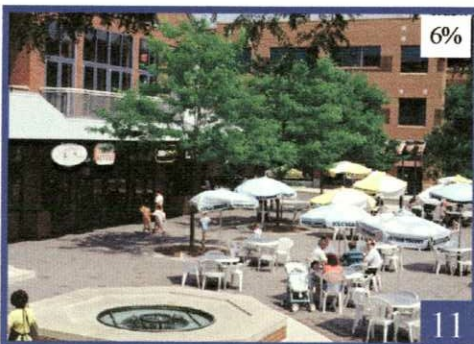
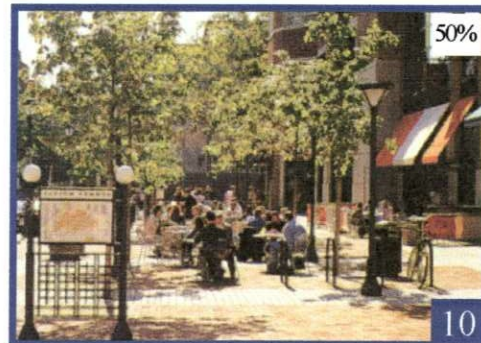
- Too much open space – smaller green is better
- Prefer informality of greenspace

## None

- Prefer greenway connecting different spaces
- Want informal socialization

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### PLAZAS



None - 10%

#### Image 9

- No comments

#### Image 10

- Awnings are nice
- Like focal point of a monument or clock tower
- Like table and chairs
- Trees are nice

#### Image 11

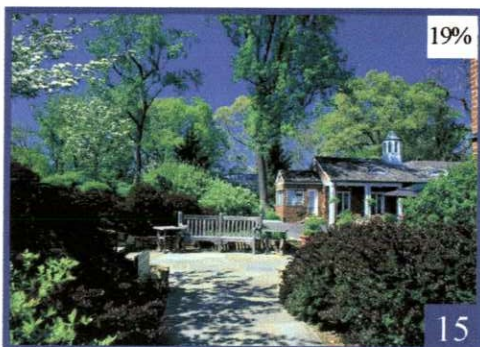
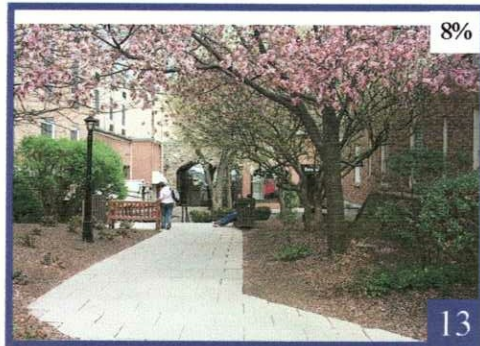
- Need more trees

#### Image 12

- Don't like buildings
- Should have a Colonial feel that is complementary to the UConn "look"
- "Meet you at the plaza"
- Want a fountain here

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### SMALL PARKS



None - 5%

#### Image 13

- Informality is important without so much paving
- Would like a fountain

#### Image 14

- Like water feature to offset road noise
- Need more shade, street lamps
- Storrs needs a beautiful gathering place
- Water element with year-round beauty and winter interest
- Water elements are too high maintenance

#### Image 15

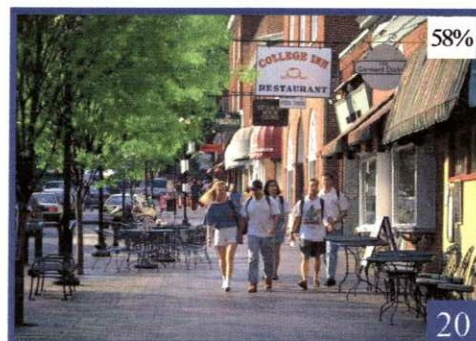
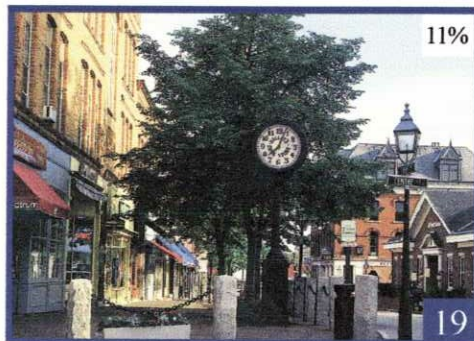
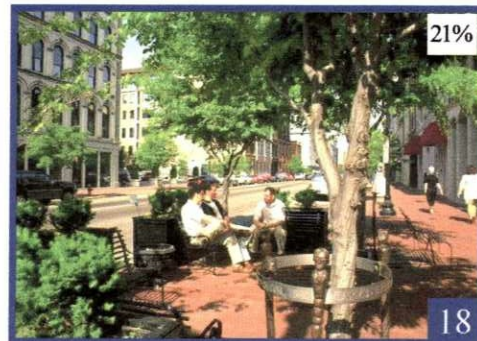
- Maintain existing architectural character
- Large shrubs creating secluded areas is nice

#### Image 16

- Storrs needs a beautiful gathering place (very euro)
- Flowering trees are great



### STREETSCAPE CHARACTER



**None - 8%**

#### **Image 17**

- Artery in middle with parked cars is good

#### **Image 18**

- Need area for people to sit and talk
- Brick sidewalk works well with University

#### **Image 19**

- Clock is nice
- Like shaded area, but prefer more seating

#### **Image 20**

- Need underground utilities
- Like awnings
- Natural look
- Keep wide sidewalks
- Like varied buildings and activity
- Like human scale apartments above businesses

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### STREETSCAPE CHARACTER



**None - 31%**

#### **Image 21**

- Too many tall buildings
- Needs brick sidewalk and more green elements
- Pedestrian friendly human scale
- Awnings and shops look great
- Don't like on-street parallel parking

#### **Image 22**

- What about a pedestrian bridges across Route 195?

#### **Image 23**

- No comments

#### **Image 24**

- No comments

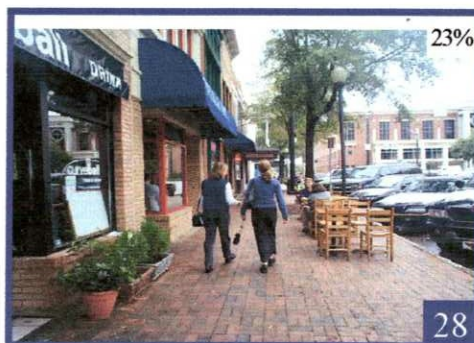
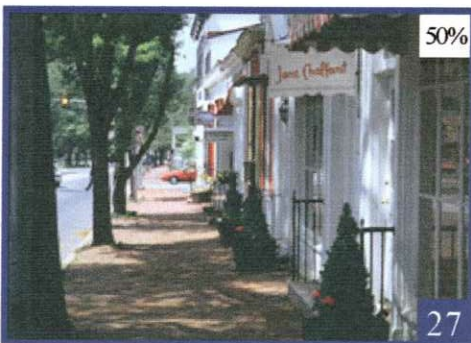
#### **None**

- Too much pavement
- Keep wide sidewalks



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### EDGE OF TOWN STREETScape



**None - 16%**

#### Image 25

- Prefer angled parking
- This image is better for the edge of town

#### Image 26

- No comments

#### Image 27

- Wood and signs are nice
- Needs wider sidewalk
- Trees along the walk are nice
- Like the shady corners

#### Image 28

- Brick looks good
- Like the outdoor tables and a wider sidewalk
- Head-in parking is nice

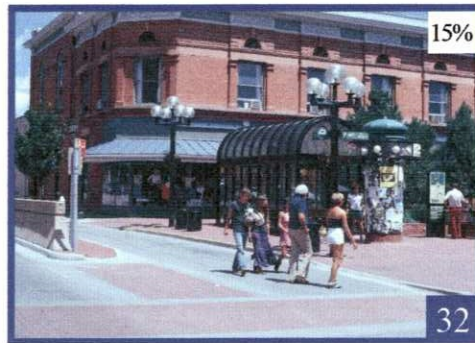
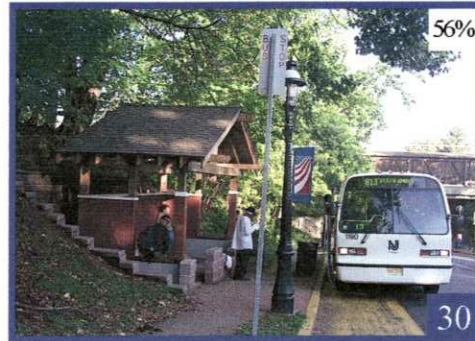
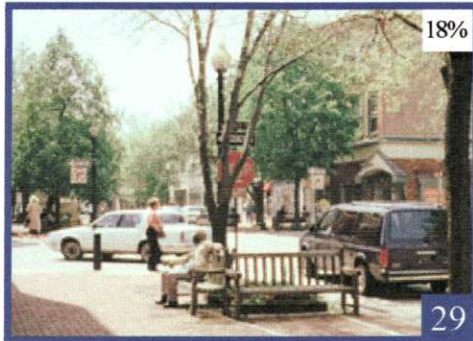
#### None

- Should not look linear or over-designed
- Over hangs are important in this region



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### TRANSIT PLACES



**None - 6%**

#### **Image 29**

- Should be located near drug store or other good waiting place
- Bikes – make it safe

#### **Image 30**

- Make sure there is sheltered bench
- Bus station needs bicycle racks
- Fits best with campus bus shelters

#### **Image 31**

- Makes sense architecturally, placement and functional
- Lots of walkways and a bus station would be great

#### **Image 32**

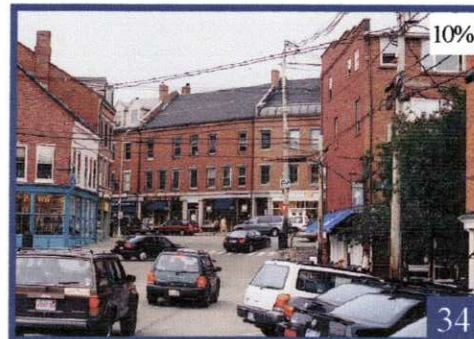
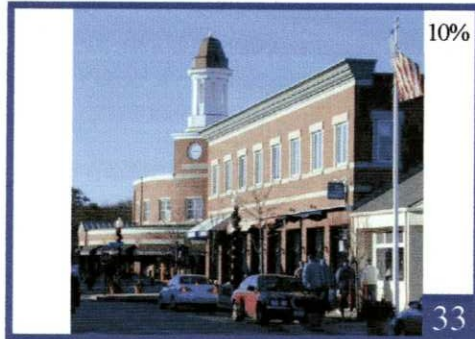
- Like bus shelter, different pavement types
- Keep bicycle riders in mind
- Try to make it look like the rest of the bus stops on campus

#### **None**

- Should be located in front of a coffee house, not in front of an artificial shelter

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



**None - 31%**

#### **Image 33**

- Like the tower – establishes a beacon, attention getting destination
- Like Colonial feel

#### **Image 34**

- Like curved road, but not traffic and wires

#### **Image 35**

- Like the varied building types

#### **Image 36**

- Like the street arrangement
- Old style fabric is good
- Don't like the parking
- I like the store fronts and buildings of varying styles – don't make them all the same height
- Perfect – looks like real New England street
- On-street parking is important

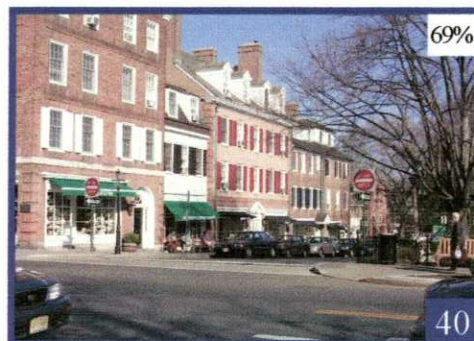
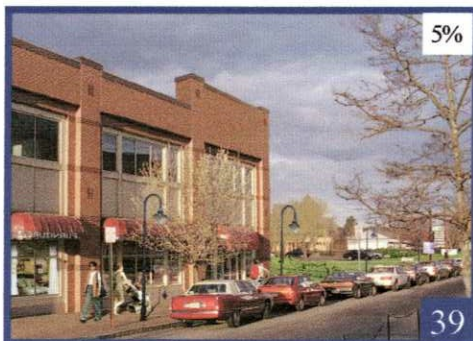
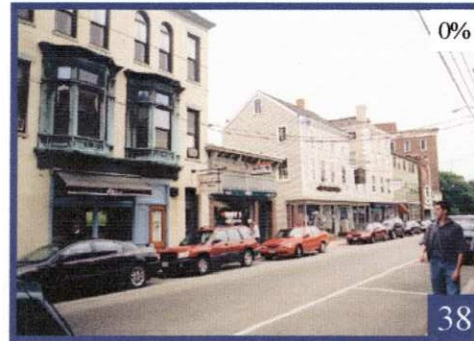
#### **None**

- Not enough space between traffic and stores



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



**None - 11%**

#### **Image 37**

- No comments

#### **Image 38**

- No comments

#### **Image 39**

- Prefer contemporary style, not "faux traditional"

#### **Image 40**

- Rounded top windows are almost symbolic of Mansfield Town Hall, Library
- Looks like a real college town
- Residential component extremely important
- Very New England – variety of size, heights, shutters are nice touch
- Brick development, walkways, lamps, park, parking are all good
- Needs buffering – flowers
- I like the varied architecture – is 4 stories too high?

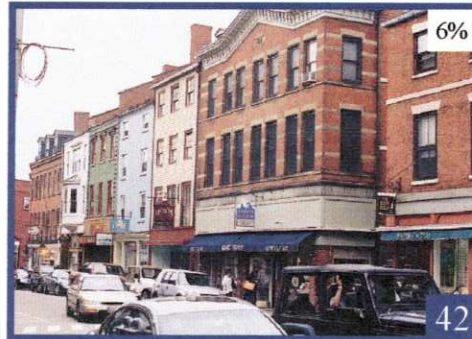
#### **None**

- No comments



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



**None - 42%**

#### **Image 41**

- No comments

#### **Image 42**

- Not so tall

#### **Image 43**

- Like the tower

#### **Image 44**

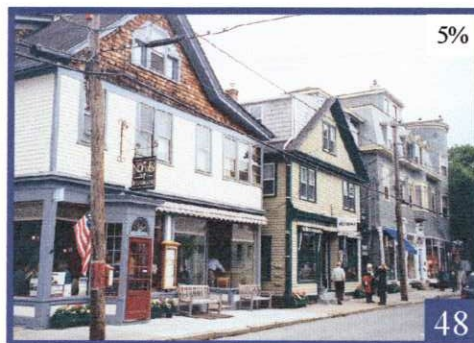
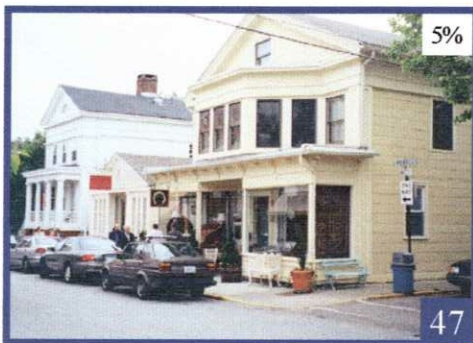
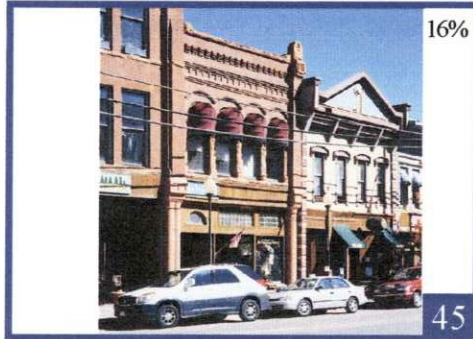
- Great for housing
- Might be nice for apartment complex, but too industrial looking
- Keep in mind students living there – must be easy to maintain

#### **None**

- Non-linear street layout would be interesting
- Smaller shop setbacks

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



**None - 42%**

#### **Image 45**

- Like the variation of facades

#### **Image 46**

- Brick with white wood trim is classy as well as complementary to the environs
- Homey brick building

#### **Image 47**

- No comments

#### **Image 48**

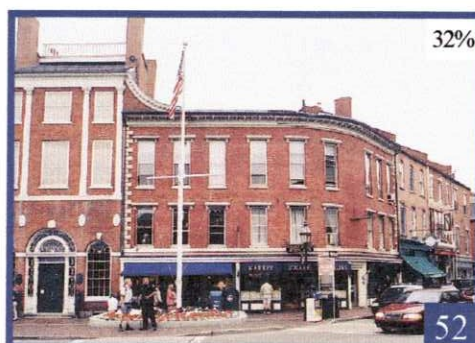
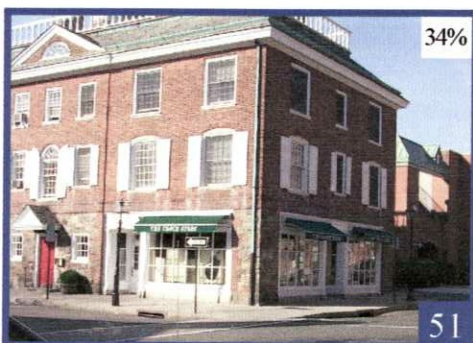
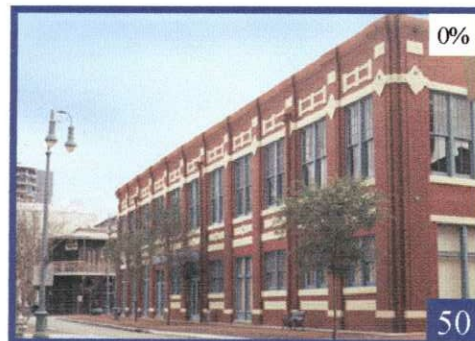
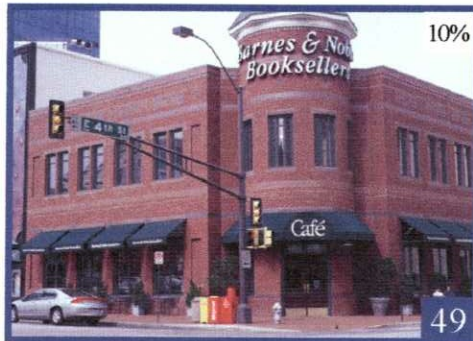
- No comments

#### **None**

- Go back to Palmer Square image #40



### ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



**None - 24%**

#### Image 49

- Tower over café is attractive
- No advertisements on buildings

#### Image 50

- No comments

#### Image 51

- Rounded windows are nice
- Prefer contemporary style, not "faux traditional"

#### Image 52

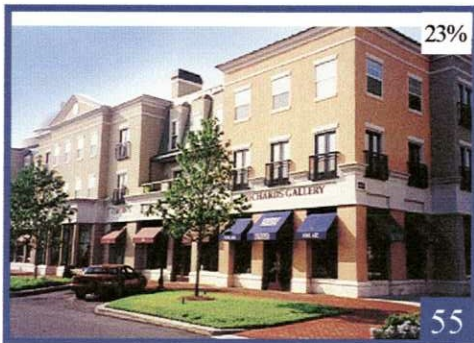
- Smaller shops are better
- Interesting corner treatment
- Nice windows on corner building
- Look at more contemporary architecture

#### None

- No comments

## Center Character Survey Analysis

### STOREFRONT ARCHITECTURE



**None - 19%**

#### **Image 53**

- Like lower buildings

#### **Image 54**

- Allows for individuality

#### **Image 55**

- Parking in front of stores slows down traffic incredibly
- Phony, but that's what we are looking for

#### **Image 56**

- Classic mom & pop – fosters a better community than big chain stores

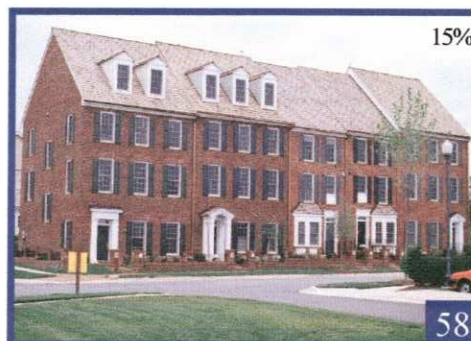
#### **None**

- No comments



## Center Character Survey Analysis

### RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE



**None - 32%**

#### **Image 57**

- Like apartments above stores

#### **Image 58**

- No comments

#### **Image 59**

- Like wood and brick combo
- Like porches – ability to add vitality to area, good for character and weather
- Porches not for suburban look

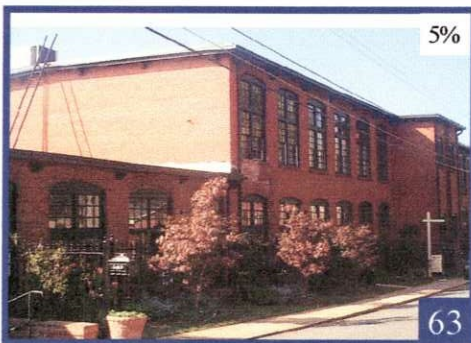
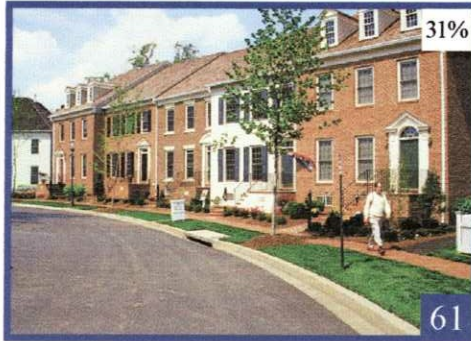
#### **Image 60**

- No comments

#### **None**

- Single-family houses around the green
- Not really New England
- Offsets all the brick and 'block' buildings of UConn

### RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE



**None - 21%**

#### **Image 61**

- How about Philadelphia rowhouses?

#### **Image 62**

- Like porches – adds potential interaction among residents

#### **Image 63**

- Too industrial

#### **Image 64**

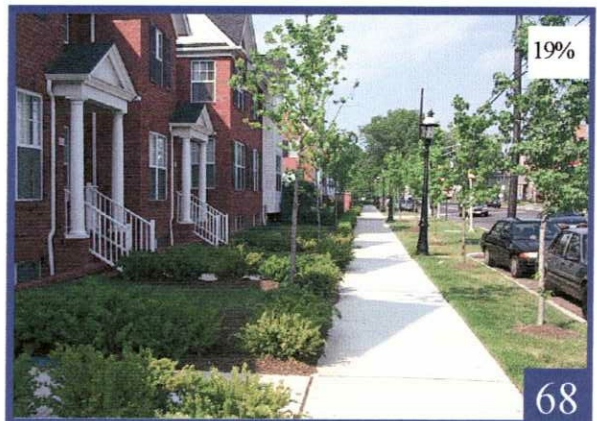
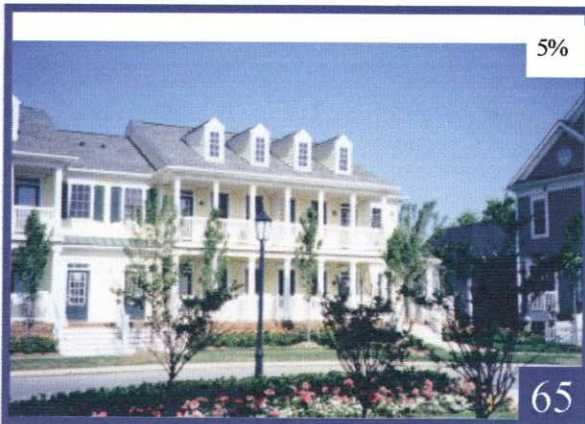
- Needs wider sidewalk and grass strip
- Scale too big
- Colonial look is very Connecticut

#### **None**

- All look too contrived
- Make housing open to all – affordable for students and families



### Residential Architecture



**None - 8%**

#### **Image 65**

- Like porches

#### **Image 66**

- Who would maintain it?
- Cute flowers, patterned walkway, recessed from street
- Scale is nice
- Lots of second story windows

#### **Image 67**

- Landscaping that is low maintenance, but definitely include it
- Needs more greenery and sidewalk
- Like street front design

#### **Image 68**

- Removed from road

#### **None**

- Too urban